

Outside of the orchestral concerts there has been very little in the way of new music. The San Francisco String Quartet resurrected the dreadful *Third Quartet* of Glière, and William Primrose introduced Arthur Benjamin's stiff and meaningless little *Viola Concerto on Themes by Cimarosa*.

Alfred Frankenstein

## REVUELTAS REACHES PHILADELPHIA

ACCORDING to certain Mexicans some very special manuscripts by a composer known to many by name but to few by his music have been fermenting in dark cellars awaiting their toast, now long overdue. Philadelphia at last has heard one of these works. The Twentieth Century Music Group was blessed with a unique set of parts from one of the high priests of North and South American music, so with no score but much faith the work was programmed and proved to be the feature of this city's midwinter season. *Musica da feria* by Silvestre Revueltas, a work in five compact parts for string quartet, begins with a daring projection of an embryonic exposition of unusually exciting material, and holds the listener in its grip to the very end where all aspects of thematic growth reach their completion. This kind of form often finds itself struggling from the vague to the obvious. Revueltas, however, moves from the promise and hope of a very personal, imaginative beginning to the revelation of a benedictive, folk-like outcome. The fast and vigorous early portion of the quartet is followed by a strange, sustained and sensitive singing section where the melody has two or three notes for its goal. These are referred to repeatedly and each time a different meaning comes from the subtle melodic changes that precede these recurrent high points and not from a rhythmic or harmonic shift here and there. Then a series of climaxes strikes a high pitch of intensity and forges ahead relentlessly without overreaching the maximum of emotion. It is in the fourth section that the motives resulting from the moving formal structure take the fore and become more and more folk-like in character until the finale breaks out with a surging, earthy, sonorous glorification of the whole.

On the same program we heard Alexander Tcherepnine's *Second Sonata for Cello and Piano*, Ernst Krenek's *Suite, Opus 84, for Solo Cello*, and Norman Dello Joio's *Second Piano Sonata*. In the cello sonata, Tcherepnine successfully uses a plan that seldom comes off in performance. The first movement is one continuous line with both instruments

sticking fast to their share in a two-part contrapuntal scheme, the piano carrying its voice in unison and working climactically to a single high cello note, an unexpected but comfortable close. Unfortunately much the same process is tried again in the second movement, and there it falls flat. The finale is made static by a wandering cello melody lounging in the company of piano arpeggios. By this time the listener involuntarily changes his mind about the first movement. Krenek insisted that his solo cello avoid all non-essentials and worked on this point so diligently that he seemed to lose sight of what he had started out to say. Though the five pieces that go to make up this work are extremely short the *Suite* is weakened by many loose ends. In the third and fourth, there is a poor use of dissonant melodic intervals and at points where the tension should have been greatest there are untimely consonant skips. Norman Dello Joio has taken big strides between his first and second piano sonatas. Although one misses the simplicity of the finale of the *First*, this work is challenging to a pianist and at the same time has high spirit and a controlled improvisational treatment. The slow movement is weak in formal ideas but contains some of the most moving music of the sonata.

We were glad William Schuman's *Third String Quartet* was presented by the same group by popular request; it has original creative mood and optimistic and energetic drive rarely found in such abundance. In this work the composer refrains from going beyond the emotional breaking point, a virtue not found in some other Schuman pieces. The music is personal in conception with a lyricism that sometimes touches the elegiac. The themes have a positive personality and are worked out in strong profile. The Shostakovitch *Piano Quintet* (also by request) gives us more hope for a rescue of this big talent than any of his works since the *First Symphony*. The five movements are free and healthy and there is a contemplative surety. Shostakovitch avoids the burlesque even in the scherzo where he almost succumbs to his urge for pranks. The quintet contains one of the most natural fugues in contemporary literature. It is "un-scholastic" and deeply impressive without pretentiousness.

The pace of the Philadelphia Orchestra in presenting newer works is not what it was in the fall rush, but it has given us the privilege of hearing Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. This Biblically evocative work juxtaposes the well-managed feeling of ancient church writing with the nervous unrest of our time. In the last movement the tremendous climaxes alternating with the quiet alleluias are unforgettable.

Howard Hanson conducted the orchestra in his *Fourth Symphony*. It is written of course in broad outlines with sombre harmonies, emotional outbursts and lush lyric spots familiar to all of us. Nevertheless, the symphony is sturdier and more direct than his former works in that medium. William Kapell's stirring performance of the Khatchatourian *Piano Concerto* was so dynamic and convincing that the concerto held together despite its many weaknesses. This post-graduate Borodin work is a long venture into improvisational Caucasian folk-lore and is packed with stock tricks, regularly interrupting cadenzas and romantic interludes; and the lavish subject material is almost strong enough to bear the repetitive thematic development given it. The revised *Symphony in One Movement* of Samuel Barber still has the kind of doubling in its scoring that deadens the bolder passages when they should have been projected. The opening is restless rather than forceful and calms down to a slow oboe stretch that lacks the lyric qualities promised. Two faults that Barber has since fought off are in full evidence throughout the scherzo section. He chances upon an attractive passage and presumes that his listening guests would like copies in their favorite colors; thus abruptly he spans the gaps between sections and disconcerts his critical followers. Behind these weaknesses is a wealth of creative talent, recently freed in the *Second Essay*.

The Philadelphia Orchestra was responsible for three discouraging encounters that really threw us off balance, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Overture, "The Taming of the Shrew,"* Dmitri Kabalevsky's *Overture to "Colas Breugnon, Master of Clamecy"* and Shostakovitch's *"Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" - Three Fragments*. The Castelnuovo-Tedesco music offered no reason why the composer should have accepted the task of setting Shakespeare. The bright colors could not hide the shameful, falling chromatic droolings nor the saccharine fill-in pads. The Kabalevsky overture was better, but as yet the composer has not rid himself of those romantic sequences that bring a piece to a stop. It is otherwise rhythmically gay and humorous. Quinto Maganini is responsible for the dully chosen fragments from the Shostakovitch opera, a poor selection that gives us nothing but the vulgar residue of the large stage work.

Vincent Persichetti

## AMERICANA, NEW AND OLD

THE only "first performances anywhere" in recent weeks in Cleveland were the two prize winning works in the Cleveland Orchestra's